

FIRST CHAPTER

Examination of Conditions

The first verse of chapter one introduces the first part of the *Fundamental Wisdom*: describing the lack of inherent existence of dependent arising. This section sets forth the selflessness of both phenomena and persons; chapter one explains the emptiness of phenomena through an examination of agency and action with respect to a cause and its effect.

The *Fundamental Wisdom* reads:

1.
**Neither from itself nor from another
Nor from both
Nor without cause
Does anything, anywhere, ever arise.**

An alternative translation of the first verse is:

1.
**Not from itself, not from something different,
Not from both and not without a cause
Does any thing, anywhere,
ever arise.**

This verse presents the fourfold reasoning that establishes the emptiness of arising. Among the eight attributes of dependent arising, the two verses of homage of the *Fundamental Wisdom* mention the emptiness of ceasing first (**does not cease, does not arise**, and so forth). However, since it is easier to understand the lack of inherent existence of ceasing after having understood the lack of inherent existence of arising, the remaining verses of the *Fundamental Wisdom* explain the emptiness of arising first.

The meaning of the first verse is that an impermanent phenomenon does not arise inherently because (1) it does **not** arise **from itself**; (2) it does **not** arise **from something** inherently **different**; (3) it does **not** arise **from both**—itself and something inherently different—and (4) it does **not** arise **without a cause** since there is **no thing, anywhere** that **ever arises** in any of these four ways.

The last reason indicates that no external or internal impermanent phenomenon, at any place, at any time or owing to any philosophical system¹ ever arises from itself, from something inherently different, and so forth.

This four-part reason is called the *diamond slivers reasoning* (Tib. *rdo rje gzegs ma'i gtan tshigs*) because each reason is a powerful means of eliminating the root misconception.

Please note, that if an impermanent phenomenon's arising were to exist inherently, the phenomenon would arise either from a cause or without a cause. If it were to arise from a cause, it would arise from a cause that was (a) of the same nature as itself, (b) inherently different from it or (c) both—the same nature as itself and inherently different from it. Therefore, if arising were to exist inherently, there would be only four possibilities: an impermanent phenomenon would arise (1) from itself, (2) from something inherently different, (3) from both, or (4) without a cause.

These four extreme ways of arising are asserted by different Indian philosophical systems:

Arising from itself

The first possibility, arising from itself, is asserted by the school of the non-theistic Samkhyas (Tib: *grangs can lha med pa*), an ancient non-buddhist philosophical system that does not accept the existence of a creator god. The Samkhyas maintain that a result such as a sunflower, for example, arises from causes and conditions that are pervaded by a single primal substance (Skt. *prakṛti*, Tib. *spyi gtso bo*).

Therefore, the nature of its substantial cause, a sunflower seed, would be of the same nature as its cooperative conditions: water, warmth, and so forth. Likewise, the nature of the sunflower and the nature of its causes and conditions would also be the same.

As they accept that the sunflower seed and the sunflower are not the same, they are not saying that the sunflower arises from the sunflower itself. Nevertheless, when they assert that the sunflower arises from its seed and from its own nature—since they maintain that the two natures are the same—the sunflower must arise from its own nature and a non-manifest sunflower must exist at the time of its cause. This is how they uphold the notion of something arising from itself.

¹ Buddhist philosophical systems such as the Chittamatra school, for instance, assert that impermanent phenomena arise from inherently different causes because according to them, all phenomena exist inherently. However, that doesn't mean that *owing to or through the power of* these philosophical schools, phenomena actually exist in such a way.

NON-THEISTIC SAMKHYA SCHOOL



According to the view of the non-theistic Samkhyas, since the sunflower seed and the resultant sunflower are of the same nature, the sunflower arises from its own nature and a non-manifest sunflower must exist at the time of its cause.

Refutation of arising from itself

The refutation of arising from itself (or from something that is of the same nature) is based on demonstrating the logical absurdities or consequences of this possibility:

If a sunflower existed at the time of the sunflower seed, it would follow that there would be no point for the sunflower to arise again, because the purpose of a phenomenon's arising is for it to attain its identity² as that phenomenon. However, if this identity has already been attained, there is no need for it to arise again.

Were the Samkhyas to reply that it is not contradictory for something to have attained its identity and still have to arise, the following absurd consequence would ensue:

It would follow that arising would be endless, for the sunflower would arise again and again. This is because according to the Samkhyas, although the sunflower has already attained its identity at the time of its seed, it arises again.

Furthermore, if the sunflower were to arise again and again, the arising of the sunflower seed would also be endless, since the sunflower seed would likewise already exist at the time of its cause. Therefore, the sunflower would never be produced because the production of a sunflower follows the cessation of its seed, but an endlessly arising sunflower seed never ceases.

To this, the Samkhyas might reply that the sunflower exists in a non-manifest form at the time of its seed, and since it must arise to become manifest, there is no need for further

² For something "to attain its identity" (Tib. *rang gi bdag nyid thob pa*) as a particular phenomenon means that it becomes that phenomenon. Therefore, when a sunflower sprout, for instance, becomes a sunflower it "attains its identity" as a sunflower.

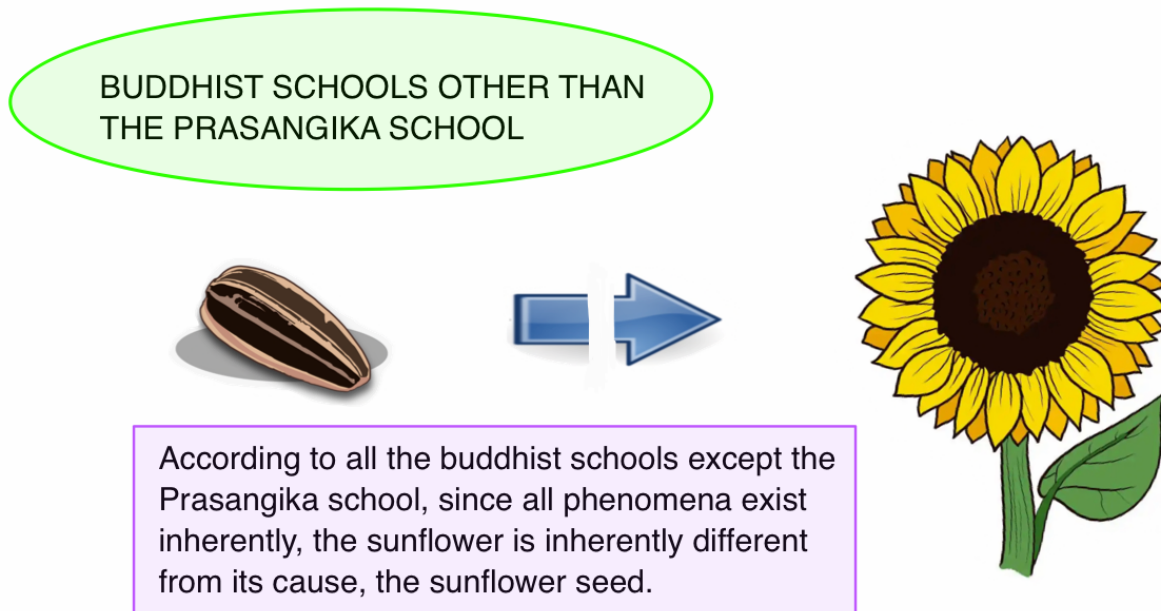
arising once it has manifested. However, this reply cannot rebut the previous logical absurdities, leading to the following argument:

If the sunflower were to exist at the time of its seed—even in a non-manifest form—it would not need to arise, for it had already arisen; and if it were to arise despite existing, infinite arising would ensue.

If, on the other hand, the Samkhyas were to say that the manifest sunflower did not exist at the time of its seed, they would be abandoning their original position and thus the view that something can only arise if it already existed at the time of its cause.

Arising from something different

The second possibility, arising from something else or from something distinct from itself, means to inherently arise from an inherently different cause. This is asserted, for instance, by all buddhist philosophical schools other than the Prasangika Madhyamika school, on the view of which the *Fundamental Wisdom* is based. Inherent existence is asserted by the Vaibashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Svatantrika Madhyamika school. According to these buddhist systems, since all phenomena exist inherently, objectively and from their own side—for otherwise they couldn't exist—a result such as the sunflower arises from an inherently different cause, the sunflower seed.



Refutation of arising from something different

The refutation of arising from something that is different from itself is also based on pointing out the logical absurdities or consequences of this extreme way of arising:

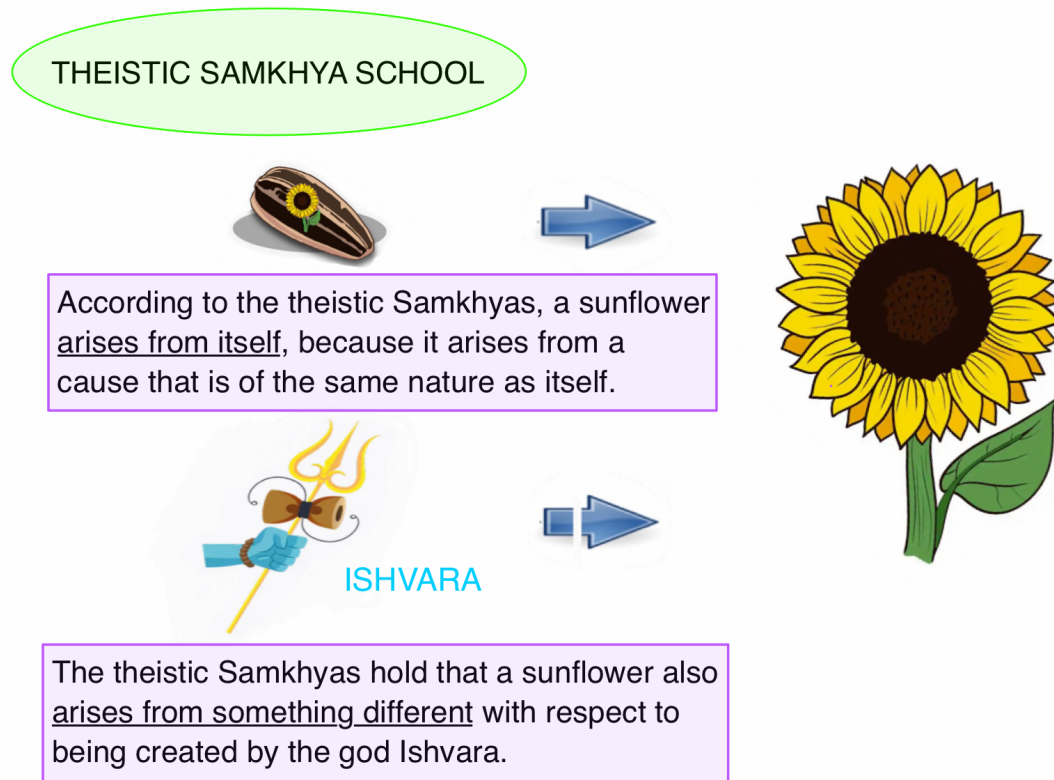
If a cause and its effect were inherently different, there would be no dependently or conventionally existent difference between them; a cause and its effect would be unrelated or disconnected phenomena. If an effect could be produced by a cause that was unrelated to it, an effect could arise from anything that is conventionally not considered to be its cause, because an effect would be equally unrelated to its cause and its non-cause. This would mean that a result such as a sunflower would arise not only from a sunflower seed but also from a rice seed, a piece of charcoal, or any other impermanent phenomenon that precedes it.

Therefore, from a buddhist point of view, since a cause and its result are mutually dependent, they are merely nominally or conventionally different.

Arising from both

This extreme way of arising refers to arising from both itself and something different; it is asserted by the ancient non-buddhist school of the theistic Samkhyas and the Jains.

Like the non-theistic Samkhyas, the theistic Samkhyas (Tib. *grang can lhar bcas pa*) maintain that a result such as a sunflower arises from a cause that is of the same nature as itself. Additionally, they hold that the sunflower is created by the god Ishvara and therefore arises from something different.

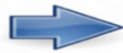


The Jains (Tib. *gcer bu ba*) assert that a sentient being arises from itself, because it is caused by the living being from the previous life that is part of the same continuum. The

living being of the present life also arises from something different, because it is the result of its karma and its parents, and so on.

Similarly, a clay pot arises from itself because it is the result of the clay, and it arises from something different as it is produced by a potter, a pottery wheel, and so forth.

JAIN SCHOOL



According to the Jains, a clay pot arises from itself, because it arises from clay that is of the same continuum as itself.



The Jains hold that a clay pot also arises from something different: a potter, a pottery wheel, and so forth.

Refutation of arising from both

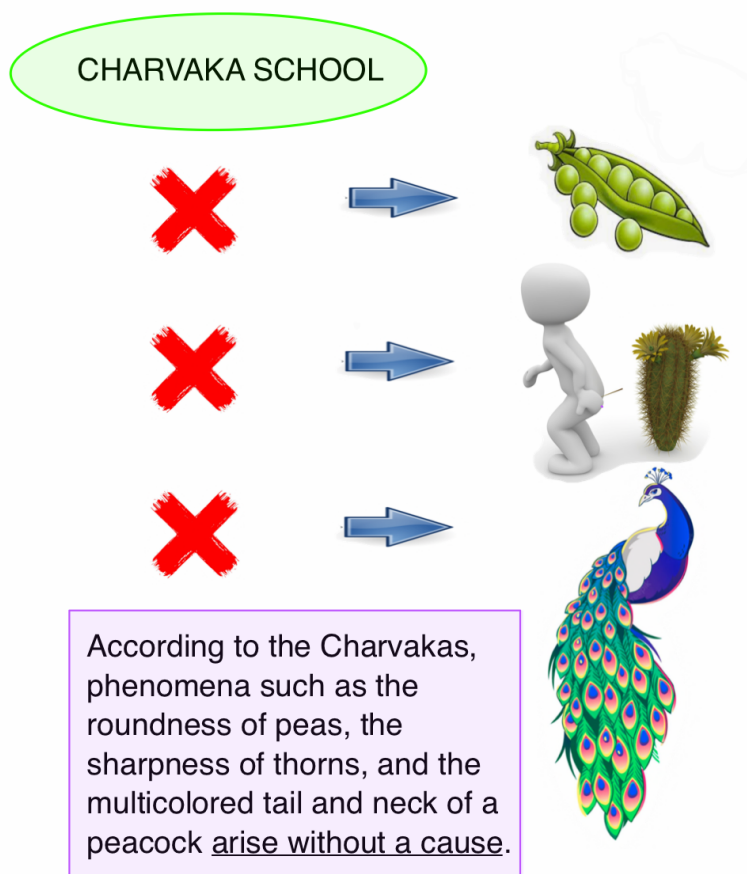
Arising from both is refuted by the same logical consequences that refute the first and the second extreme possibility.

Arising without a cause

The non-buddhist nihilistic school of the Charvakas (Tib. *rgyang 'phen pa*) asserts the fourth extreme possibility, arising without a cause.

Although the Charvakas accept the production from a cause because they hold that the making of a pot, for example, can be seen to occur in dependence on causes such as clay, a potter etc., they maintain that there are some phenomena that have no observable causes and conditions and therefore arise naturally without being produced by anything.

Examples are the roundness of peas, the length and sharpness of thorns, and the multicolored tail and neck of a peacock³.



Refutation of arising without a cause

The logical absurdities of arising without a cause are:

If there were things that arise without a cause, those things could arise from anything. Also, they could arise anytime, because they would not have to wait for their causes to be produced. The ripening of mangoes, for instance, would not occur at a specific time of the year since it would not depend on the seasons. Also, crows would have peacock feathers, and peacocks would possess parrot feathers, for none of those things would be dependent on any causes.

From a buddhist point of view, there are no impermanent phenomena that do not arise

³ Aryadeva says in his *Establishing the Reasoning that Refutes Mistaken Views* (Skt.

Skhalitapramardanayuktiheddhusiddhi, Tib. 'khrul pa bzlog pa'i rigs pa gtan tshigs grub pa):

"Also someone might say: All phenomena, the external and internal sources, are established from the entity itself, not from something different. The roundness of peas, the length and sharpness of thorns, the multicolored tail and neck of a peacock, the rising of the sun and the falling of water are established from the entity itself. They are not caused."

from causes. The roundness of a pea arises from the same cause as the pea, the length and sharpness of a thorn arises from the same cause that produced the plant on which the thorn grew, and so forth.

As mentioned before, the four-part *diamond slivers reasoning* establishes the lack of inherent existence of arising. The emptiness of arising can be realized by means of the following syllogism:

“Regarding the subject, a sunflower, it doesn’t arise inherently, because (1) it doesn’t arise from itself, (2) it doesn’t arise from something different, (3) it doesn’t arise from both—itsself and something different—and (4) it doesn’t arise without a cause.”

The tools to realize the emptiness of arising are the thorough realization of this syllogism and insight into the logical absurdities that would ensue if the sunflower or any other phenomenon were to arise inherently.

It is important to note, that not only the *object that is to be established* by the syllogism (“does not arise inherently”, i.e. the emptiness of arising) but also each of the four reasons of the diamond slivers reasoning (“doesn’t arise from itself, doesn’t arise from something different” etc.) are not only *negative phenomena* but *non-affirming negatives*.

Positive and negative phenomena

Phenomena can be categorized into (1) positive phenomena (Skt. *vidhi*, Tib. *sgrub pa*) and (2) negative phenomena (Skt. *pratiṣedha*, Tib. *dgag pa*). Positive and negative phenomena do not only refer to statements, propositions or acts of affirmation or denial but to anything that exists. Whatever exists is either a positive or a negative phenomenon and anything that is a positive or a negative phenomenon necessarily exists. Like the two truths, this division of phenomena is exhaustive; there is no third category.

The difference between the two categories is based on the manner in which phenomena are realized by conceptual consciousnesses. If a phenomenon is the main object of a conceptual consciousness that realizes the phenomenon by way of explicitly eliminating an object of negation, it is a negative phenomenon. An example is unhappiness. The conceptual consciousness perceiving unhappiness realizes its main object by way of explicitly negating happiness.

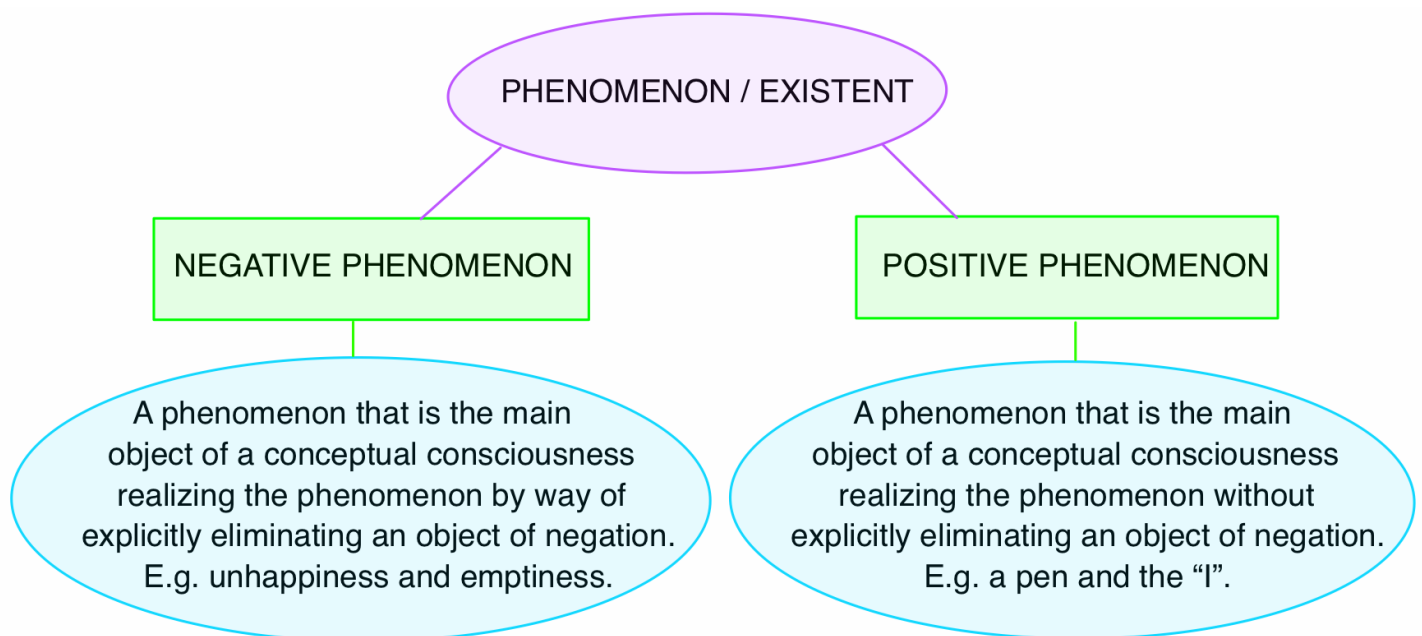
Another example is emptiness; the conceptual consciousness perceiving the lack of inherent existence realizes emptiness through explicitly eliminating inherent existence.

If a phenomenon is the main object of a conceptual consciousness that realizes the phenomenon without explicitly eliminating an object of negation, it is a positive

phenomenon. An example is a pen. The conceptual consciousness perceiving a pen realizes the pen without explicitly negating anything.

That doesn't mean that the conceptual consciousness apprehending the pen does not mentally eliminate an object of negation, for while a conceptual consciousness explicitly realizes its main object—the pen—the thought consciousness implicitly negates *not the pen*, that is, it implicitly excludes anything that is not the pen and in that way implicitly realizes *not not the pen* or the *opposite of not the pen*⁴.

Another example of a positive phenomenon is the “I”. The conceptual consciousness perceiving the “I” realizes the “I” without explicitly eliminating anything. It just implicitly eliminates *not the “I”*; it implicitly negates anything that is not the “I” and in that way implicitly realizes the *opposite of not the “I”*.



Negative phenomena can be classified into two types: (1) non-affirming negatives (Skt. *paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*, Tib. *ma yin dgag*) and (2) affirming negatives (Skt. *prasajya-pratiṣedha*, Tib. *med dgag*)

⁴ A conceptual mind that explicitly negates a phenomenon is equivalent to a conceptual mind that explicitly realizes that something is *not that phenomenon*. So, if a consciousness explicitly realizes that *x* is not *y*, it explicitly negates that *x* is *y*, and vice versa. The same is true for implicitly realizing an object. If a consciousness implicitly realizes that *x* is not *y*, it implicitly negates that *x* is *y*, and vice versa. For example, a conceptual consciousness explicitly realizing that a situation is impermanent explicitly negates that the situation is not impermanent (while implicitly negating that it is permanent and thus implicitly realizing that the situation is not permanent).

The difference between the explicit and implicit cognition of an object is that the object that is explicitly realized by a consciousness appears to that mind, whereas an object that is implicitly realized does not appear to the mind.

These two negatives are not described on the basis of the way they are realized by conceptual consciousnesses, but depending on whether or not the words used to express the negatives indicate or imply a positive phenomenon in place of their object of negation.

Non-affirming negatives

If something is a negative phenomenon and the term that expresses it does not indicate or imply a positive phenomenon in place of its object of negation, it is a non-affirming negative.

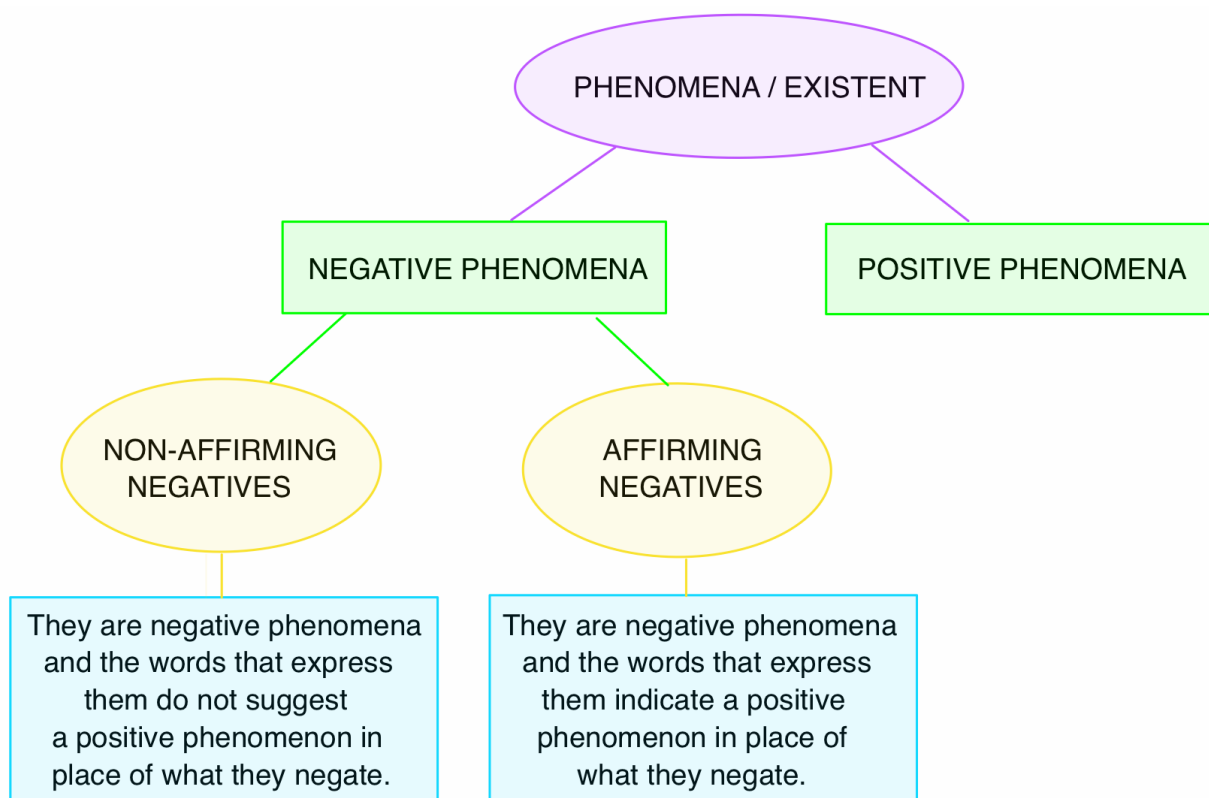
Examples are: *the eye consciousness is not physical* and *the lack of inherent existence of Jane*. They are non-affirming negatives because they are negative phenomena and the phrases “the eye consciousness is not physical” and “the lack of a inherent existence of Jane” do not indicate a positive phenomenon in place of the verbal negation of the eye consciousness being physical and the inherent existence of Jane respectively.

Affirming negatives

If something is a negative phenomenon and the term expressing it indicates a positive phenomenon in place of its object of negation, it is an affirming negative.

An example is: *an unfriendly neighbor*. It is an affirming negative because it is a negative phenomenon and the term “an unfriendly neighbor” indicates a positive phenomenon—the neighbor—in place of what the words negate, i.e. his being friendly.

Another example is: *our body is not permanent*. This too is an affirming negative because it is a negative phenomenon and the words “our body is not permanent” indicate a positive phenomenon—our body’s impermanence—in place of what the words negate, permanence.



The scriptures describe four kinds of affirming negatives: Affirming negatives of explicit suggestion (Tib. *dngos su 'phen pa*), of implicit suggestion (Tib. *shugs la 'phen pa*), of both explicit and implicit suggestion (Tib. *dngos shugs la 'phen pa*), and of contextual suggestion (Tib. *skabs stobs kyi 'phen pa*).

Affirming negatives of explicit suggestion

An example of the first type is: *the existence of the lack of inherent existence of a chair*.

This is an affirming negative, and the words “the existence of the lack of inherent existence of a chair” explicitly indicate the existence of the emptiness of the chair.

Affirming negative of implicit suggestion

Fat Devadatta does not eat during the day is an example of an affirming negative of implicit suggestion, because the phrase “fat Devadatta does not eat during the day” implicitly indicates that Devadatta eats at night.

Affirming negative of both explicit and implicit suggestion

An example of this type of negative is: *Fat Devadatta does not eat during the day and exists as someone who is non-emaciated*. The words expressing this affirming negative implicitly indicate that fat Devadatta eats at night and explicitly indicate his existence as someone who is not emaciated.

Affirming negative of contextual suggestion

An example of the fourth type of affirming negative that is given in the scriptures is: *He is not of the Brahmin class*. Although in general, this is a non-affirming negative, in a particular context it is an affirming negative.

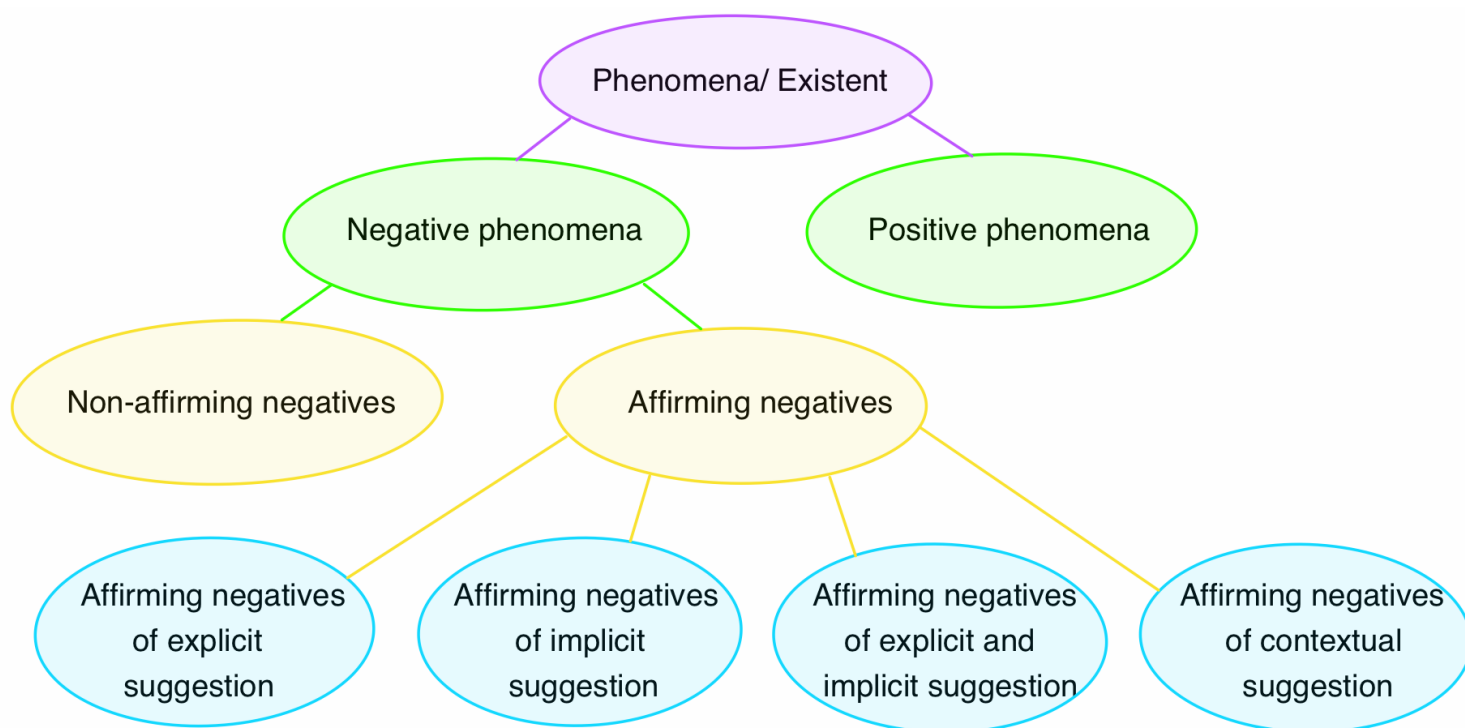
For example, if we have determined that someone like Buddha Shakyamuni is either of the royal class or the Brahmin class, but we have not determined which of the two classes he belongs to, the phrase “He is not of the Brahmin class” indicates that he is of the royal class by explicitly negating that he is of the Brahmin class.

Please note that there is a difference between negative phenomena such as (a) *the unemployed cook* and (b) *the cook is unemployed*, for the former is an affirming negative, while the latter is a non-affirming negative. In the case of *the unemployed cook*, the emphasis is primarily on the cook and the words “the unemployed cook” indicate the cook in place of negating that he is employed. In the second case—*the cook is unemployed*—the cook is merely the basis of his situation of being out of work and so the phrase “the cook is unemployed” does not indicate the cook or any other positive phenomenon in place of negating his being employed.

Similarly, (a) *John who lacks inherent existence* is an affirming negative, while (b) *John's lack of inherent existence* is a non-affirming negative.

John who lacks inherent existence refers to John himself. Although the words “John who lacks inherent existence” negate that John exists inherently, they point primarily to a conventional truth, the person John. In contrast, the phrase “John’s lack of inherent existence” primarily indicates an ultimate truth. It does not indicate John or any other positive phenomenon while explicitly negating his inherent existence; John is only mentioned as the basis of his emptiness.

To summarize the different types of negative phenomena:



It is important to understand that the four reasons of the *diamond slivers reasoning* (“does not arise from itself, does not arise from something different,” etc.) and what they establish—the lack of inherent existence of arising—are non-affirming negatives.

The four reasons of the *diamond slivers reasoning* are all non-affirming negatives, because by negating the different extreme ways of arising, without indicating or implying any positive phenomenon, their perception does not reinforce the wrong view of reification.

The same is true of the emptiness of arising or the emptiness of any other phenomenon. If the negation of inherent existence were not so categorical that only the lack of inherent existence is perceived by the mind that directly realizes emptiness, there would be reification in the form of an appearance of inherent existence. This, in turn, would strengthen the root misperception and thus defeat the purpose of directly realizing emptiness, which is to undermine and gradually eradicate the self-grasping mind.

Therefore, for the negation of inherent existence to be fully effective, emptiness must be a non-affirming negative that leaves no opening for the affirmation of a positive phenomenon. If a positive phenomenon were implied, such an affirmation would give rise to the appearance of a conventional truth (since a positive phenomenon is necessarily a conventional truth) and thus, to the appearance of inherent existence to the mind directly realizing emptiness.

However, although the term “emptiness” does not indicate a conventional truth in place of negating objective or intrinsic existence, emptiness is compatible with conventional truths. In fact, the ultimate truth and the conventional truth of a particular phenomenon are of one nature and therefore exist in dependence on each other. For example, a cup is a conventional truth and the cup and its ultimate truth are of one nature. Thus, the conventional truth, the cup, and the ultimate truth of the cup are inextricably linked, so that one cannot exist without the other. Also, without first realizing the lack of intrinsic and objective existence of the cup, it is not possible to realize that the cup is a conventional truth.

Non-affirming negatives can be divided into two types: those whose object of negation exists and those whose object of negation does not exist. An example of the first type is: *the mind is not a physical phenomenon*. This is a non-affirming negative because its object of negation, a physical phenomenon, exists.

An example of the second type is *emptiness*, because its object of negation has never existed, does not presently exist, and will never exist.

The realization of emptiness, therefore, is not a case of destroying something that once existed. Instead, it means to cognize a characteristic of phenomena, a negative attribute that is the mere non-existence of a mode of existence that is impossible, but that our mind constantly assumes to be the case.

In order to realize emptiness, we must first investigate whether phenomena do exist as they appear to our different types of mind or as they are perceived by our root misperception. This is done by taking a specific phenomenon such as arising, the “I”, the body, or anything else, and then subjecting it to ultimate analysis.

As mentioned earlier, our mind has to examine whether an inherently existent house, for example, exists as being one with its parts, different from its parts, and so on. In this way, a mind engaged in ultimate analysis—a *reasoning consciousness of ultimate analysis* (Tib. *mthar thug dpyod pa'i rigs shes*)—searches for the inherent existence of the house among its roof, walls, windows, and so on. But since that mode of existence is nowhere to be found, the reasoning awareness of ultimate analysis finds only the lack of inherent

existence of the house, for neither the house nor its inherent existence *withstands ultimate analysis*.

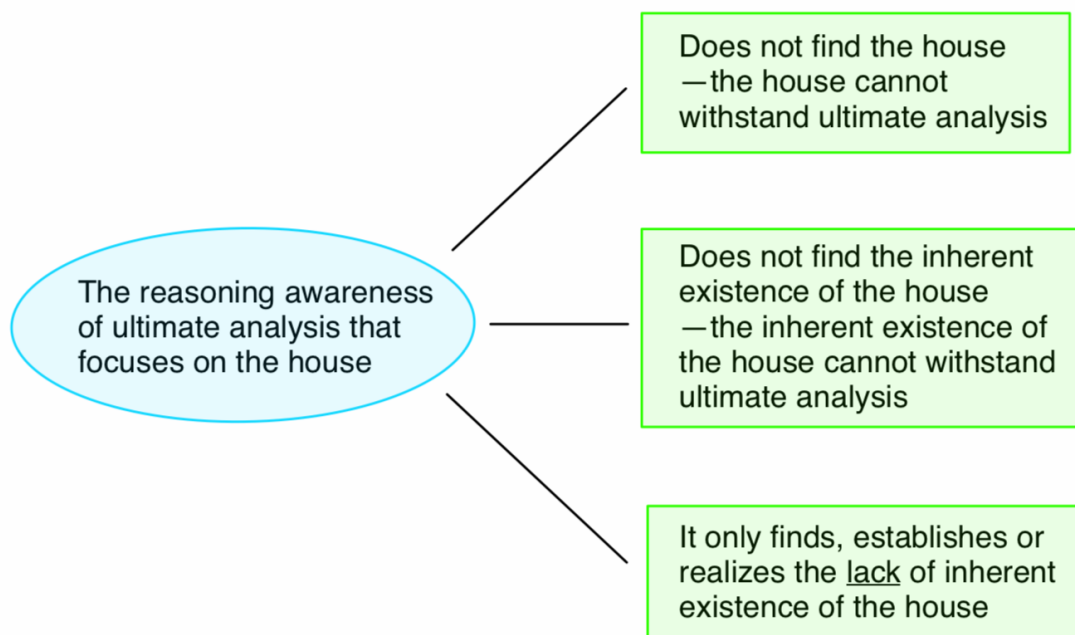
The meaning of these three is important:

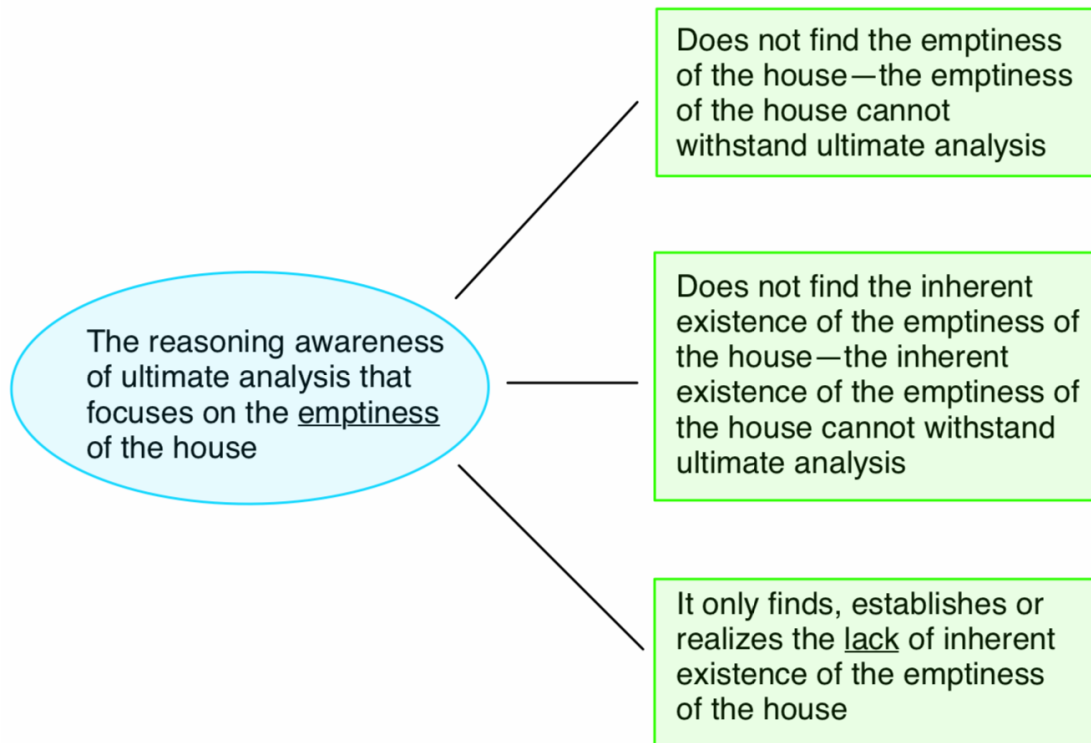
- (1) being found by a reasoning awareness of ultimate analysis
- (2) being established by a reasoning awareness of ultimate analysis, and
- (3) not withstanding ultimate analysis by such an awareness.

If the reasoning awareness of ultimate analysis that focuses on the house were to find the house or its inherent existence, the house would withstand ultimate analysis and not be merely designated; it would exist objectively and not depend on anything else. However, since this is not the case, the mind only finds the absence of inherent existence of the house, because it *establishes*, that is, realizes, the lack of inherent existence of the house.

Thus, finding the lack of inherent existence of the house means that the reasoning mind establishes or realizes the emptiness of the house. It establishes the ultimate truth of the house, so it is an ultimate valid cognizer. However, although the reasoning awareness of ultimate analysis that focuses on the house finds the emptiness of the house, this does not mean that the emptiness of the house exists inherently and is not merely designated. For this mind of ultimate analysis was not searching for the inherent existence of the emptiness of the house, but for the inherent existence of the house.

On the other hand, a reasoning mind of ultimate analysis that focuses on the emptiness of the house does not find the emptiness of the house or the inherent existence of the emptiness of the house, because neither the ultimate truth of the house nor its inherent existence can withstand ultimate analysis. Instead, the mind finds the emptiness of the emptiness of the house and thus establishes or realizes that ultimate truth.





Having presented in the first verse a general refutation of the four extremes of arising by means of the *diamond slivers reasoning*, the focus now turns specifically to refuting arising from something different. At this point, Nagarjuna does not elaborate on the refutation of the other three extreme positions, since they are clearly untenable and since the view that things do not arise from intrinsically different causes is more difficult to understand.

With the second verse of the first chapter of the *Fundamental Wisdom*, Nagarjuna presents a buddhist view that is contrary to the Prasangika Madhyamika view.

The *Fundamental Wisdom* reads:

2.

**There are four conditions. There is an efficient condition;
And similarly, there is the objective condition,
Immediate condition, and the dominant condition.
There is no fifth condition.**

An alternative translation of this verse is:

2.

**There are four conditions: the causal
And similarly, the observed,
The immediate, and the dominant.
There is no fifth condition.**

With this verse, followers of the buddhist schools that accept inherent existence (i.e. the Vaibashika, Sautrantika, Cittamatra, and Svatantrika Madhyamika school) reject the refutation of arising from something inherently different, arguing that it contradicts the Buddha's teaching.

They agree with the other three refutations, for they concede that arising from itself makes no sense because it would be pointless, and therefore there is no arising from both itself and something different. Similarly, they reject causeless arising because all buddhist schools maintain that impermanent phenomena must arise in dependence on causes and conditions⁵.

However, they disagree with the Prasangika school's refutation of arising from something inherently different. According to them, the Buddha taught that phenomena arise from intrinsically different causes and conditions, because in a sūtra the Buddha explains that **there are four conditions**: there is (I) **the causal** condition, **and similarly**, there are (II) **the observed** condition, (III) **the immediately** preceding condition, **and** (IV) **the dominant** condition. **There is no fifth condition** because all causes and conditions are subsumed under the four conditions, and there is no fifth condition such as a Creator God.

Regarding the meaning of these four conditions, some buddhist schools hold that the four are as described in Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* (Skt. *abhidharmakośa*, Tib. chos *mngon pa mdzod*), a treatise that mainly details the assertions of the Vaibashika school.

In the second chapter of the *Treasury of Knowledge*, Vasubandhu explains the four conditions together with the six causes, presenting the latter not as a separate category, but as included in the four conditions. The six causes are: (1) active cause, (2) concurrent cause, (3) homogeneous cause, (4) concomitant cause, (5) omnipresent cause, and (6) ripening cause. It is important to note, however, that according to the Vaibashika school, some of these causes are characterized as permanent, as merely not preventing an effect from arising, or as existing simultaneously with their results. Therefore, they are not considered to be actual causes by the other buddhist schools, which maintain that a cause must be impermanent, that it must have the potential to actively produce its result, and that a cause and its result cannot exist at the same time.

⁵ Please note that in general, cause (Skt. *hetu*, Tib. *rgyu*) and condition (Skt. *pratyaya*, Tib. *rkyen*) are synonymous and are used as alternative terms to describe different kinds of causes. For example, although a sunflower seed, soil, water, fertilizer, warmth etc. are all the causes of a sunflower sprout, the sunflower seed that transforms into the sunflower sprout (and is considered to be the main cause of the sprout) is referred to as *substantial cause*, while soil, water, fertilizer, warmth, etc., that assist the seed to transform into the sprout (and are considered to be the secondary cause of the sprout) are referred to as *cooperative conditions*. Similarly, although the color blue is the cause of an eye consciousness perceiving blue, it is called the *observed condition* (or *observed object condition*) of that awareness.

However, despite the differences between the Vaibashika school and the other buddhist schools regarding the meaning of a cause, it is beneficial to understand the six causes in order to develop a deeper insight into causality from the perspective of the higher buddhist tenet systems.

The six causes:

1. Active cause

An active cause (Skt. *karaṇa hetu*, Tib. *byed rgyu*) refers to any impermanent or permanent phenomenon — other than the result itself — that does not impede the arising of that result. An active cause is either (a) potent or (b) non-potent.

(a) Potent active causes are causes that actively generate or produce their results.

An example is a barley seed that produces a barley sprout.

(b) Non-potent active causes are permanent or impermanent phenomena that allow the arising of a result. Examples are uncompounded space or a rice sprout, which do not prevent the growth of a barley sprout.

2. Concurrent cause

Concurrent causes (Skt. *sahabhū hetu*, Tib. *lhan cig 'byung ba'i rgyu*) exist simultaneously with their result. They refer to at least two phenomena that are considered to serve as each others' cause and effect, since one cannot exist without the other, and therefore, one is necessary for the other's existence. Examples are the four elements (earth, water, fire and wind) that make up a table and serve as each other's concurrent cause.

3. Homogeneous cause

A homogeneous cause (Skt. *sabhāga hetu*, Tib. *skal mnyam gyi rgyu*) refers to a cause that produces a result of the same type as itself. The same type means that contaminated virtues are the same type as other contaminated virtues, uncontaminated states are the same type as other uncontaminated states, afflicted states are the same type as other afflicted states, and so on. For example, the first moment of contaminated compassion (i.e. compassion that is affected by afflictions such as ignorance or attachment) is the homogeneous cause of the second moment of contaminated compassion and a sunflower seed is the homogeneous cause of a sunflower sprout.

4. Concomitant cause

A concomitant cause (Skt. *saṃprayukta hetu*, Tib. *mtshungs ldan gyi rgyu*) is

a cause that exists simultaneously with its result and refers to a main mind and its associated mental factors. A main mind and its mental factors serve as the concomitant cause of each other. Examples are a main mind thinking about a book and the associated feeling, the associated discernment, and so forth.

5. Omnipresent cause

An omnipresent cause (Skt. *sarvatraga hetu*, Tib. *kun tu 'gro ba'i brgyu*) is an afflicted cause that produces an afflicted result which belongs to the same level of samsaric existence as itself. The three levels of samsaric existence are: the level of the desire realm, the level of the form realm and the level of the formless realm. An example of an omnipresent cause is a mind grasping at a self-sufficient substantially existent self that generates a self-centered mind, with both minds belonging to the level of the desire realm.

6. Ripening cause

A ripening cause (Skt. *vipāka hetu*, Tib. *rnam smin gyi rgyu*) is a cause that produces a ripened karmic result, mainly in the form of the contaminated aggregates. Ripening causes are either non-virtues or contaminated virtues (i.e. virtues that are affected by the afflictions such as ignorance, attachment etc.). Contaminated neutral actions lack the power to produce ripened karmic results and uncontaminated virtues are free from the effect of attachment without which they cannot generate a ripened karmic result. An example of a ripening cause is the contaminated virtuous karma that causes rebirth in the human realm.

The four conditions are:

I. Causal condition

A causal condition (Skt. *hetu pratyaya*, Tib. *rgyu rkyen*) is any of the five causes other than the active cause, because the other five refer to specific causes, while active causes refer to causes in general, which is why they are more pervasive. Therefore, concurrent causes, homogenous causes, concomitant causes, omnipresent causes, and ripening causes are all causal conditions.

II. Observed condition

An observed condition (Skt. *ālambana pratyaya*, Tib. *dmigs rkyen*) refers to the principal object of the six types of consciousness — the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness — and includes all phenomena. The observed conditions of the sense consciousnesses are sense objects in relative proximity to the person in whose continuum the sense consciousnesses arise; visual

phenomena (i.e. shape and color) in the case of an eye consciousness, sounds in the case of an ear consciousness, and so on.

According to the Vaibashika, the observed condition of a mental consciousness consists of all the impermanent and permanent phenomena of the past, present, and future.

Examples of an observed condition are a chair or the sound of water, which serve as the observed object of an eye consciousness perceiving a chair or an ear consciousness perceiving the sound of water. They serve as the observed condition of these awarenesses because, in dependence on them, the eye consciousness arises in the aspect of the chair (i.e. the chair appears to it) and the ear consciousness arises in the aspect of the sound of water (i.e. the sound of water appears to it).

III. Immediately preceding condition

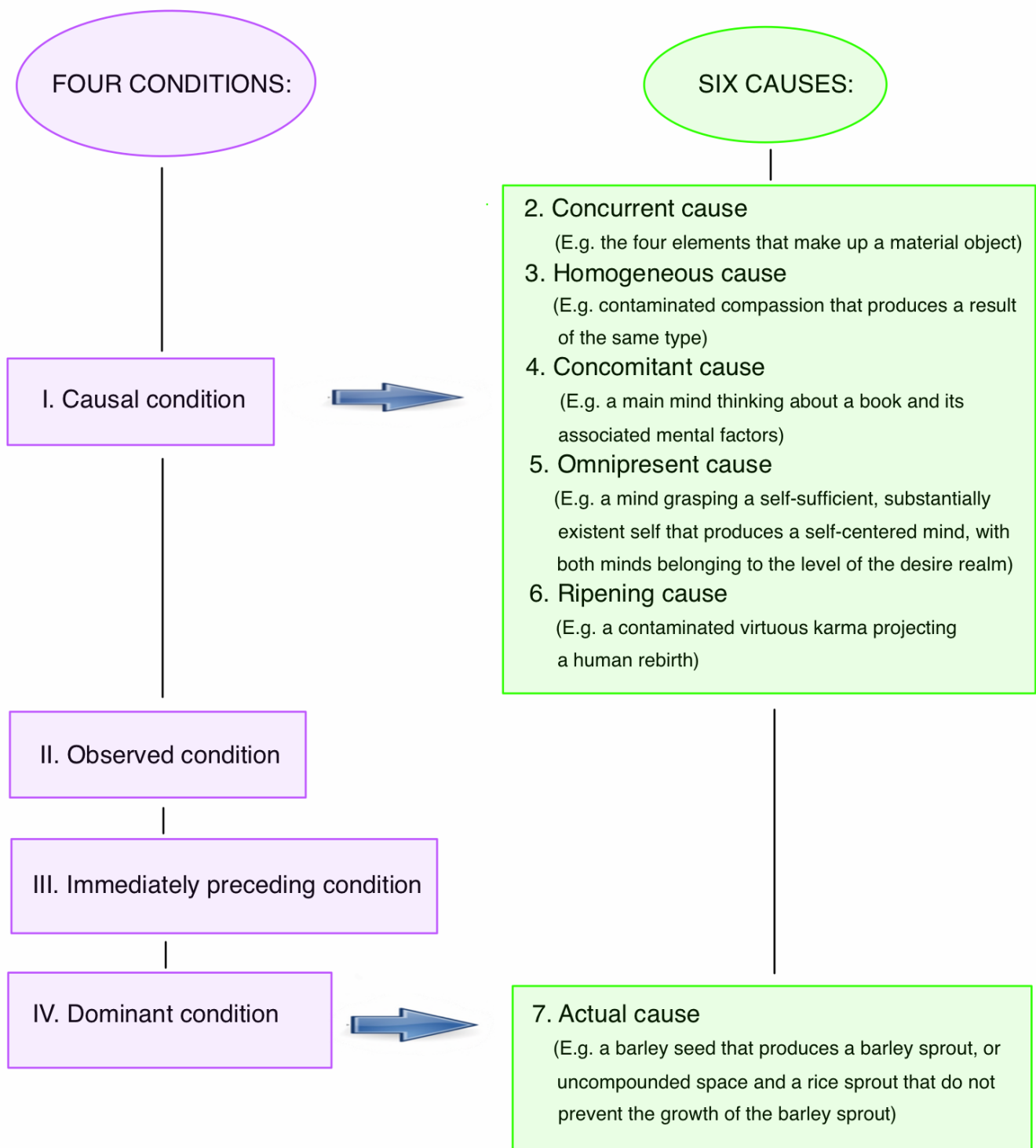
An immediately preceding condition (Skt. *anantara pratyaya*, Tib. *de ma thag rkyen*) is a consciousness that arises a moment before a sense or mental consciousness arises and acts as a cause of that sense or mental consciousness, being mainly responsible for its clear and knowing attributes. If a sense or mental awareness were not preceded by an earlier moment of awareness, it would not be able to manifest as an experiencing and aware entity capable of knowing its object. An example is the last moment of a nose consciousness smelling incense that serves as the immediately preceding condition of the first moment of a nose consciousness smelling coffee.

However, the immediately preceding condition of a sense consciousness is not necessarily a sense consciousness, and the immediately preceding condition of a mental consciousness is not necessarily a mental consciousness, because sense and mental consciousnesses can serve as each other's immediately preceding condition. For example a dreaming mental consciousness in the continuum of a person who is about to wake up serves as the immediately preceding condition of the first moment of the eye consciousness in the continuum of the person who has just awakened since it generates the clear and knowing entity of that eye consciousness.

IV. Dominant condition

Dominant conditions (Skt. *adhipati pratyaya*, Tib. *bdag rkyen*) and active causes are synonymous. Therefore, according to the Vaibashika school, dominant conditions refer to any impermanent or permanent phenomena — other than the results themselves — that do not impede the arising of those results.

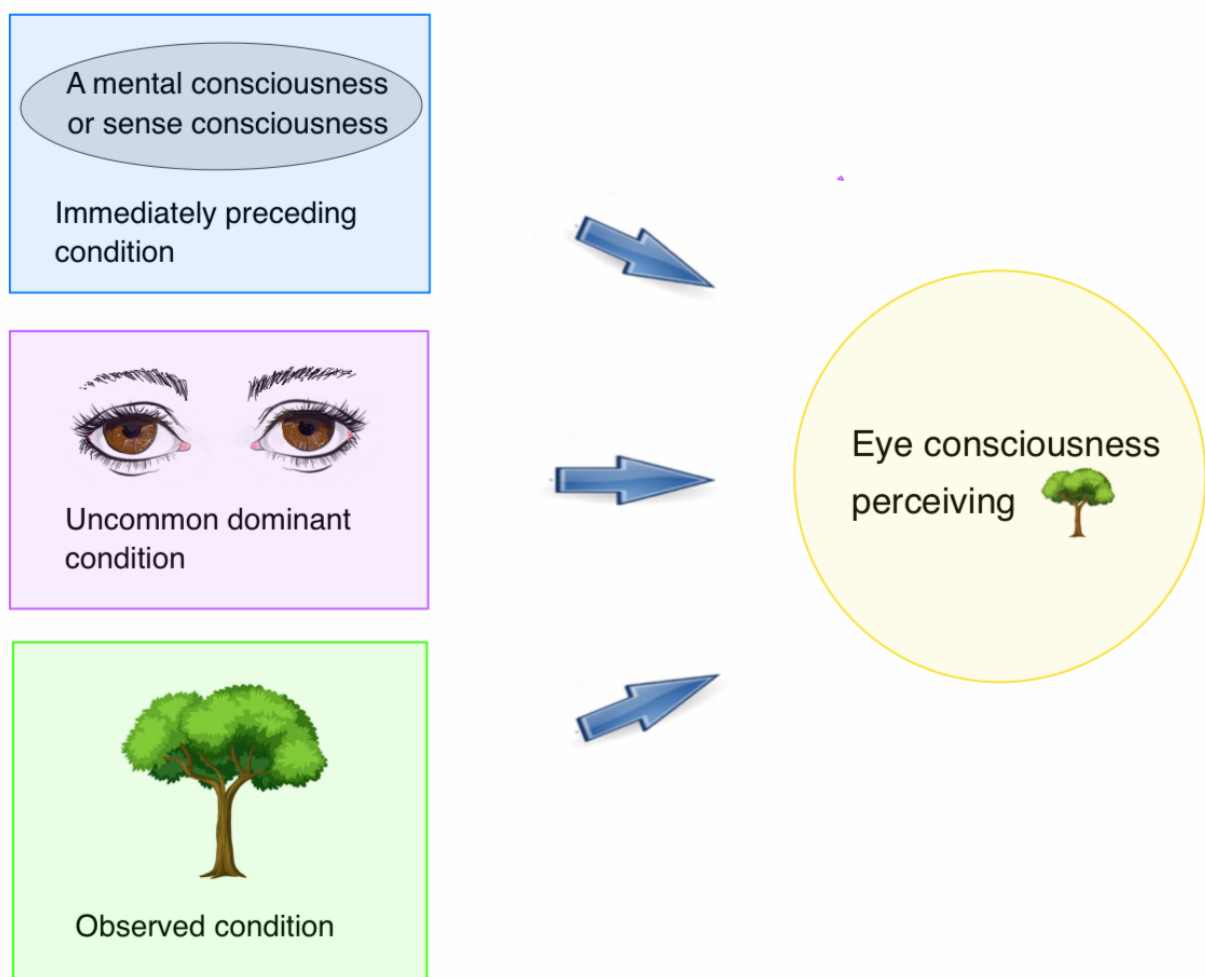
The four conditions and six causes:



However, there is a difference between a dominant condition and an *uncommon* dominant condition (which is also referred to as “uncommon empowering condition”). An uncommon dominant condition, together with an observed condition and an immediately preceding condition, are the principal causes that give rise to a consciousness.

The uncommon dominant conditions of the five sense consciousnesses are the five sense faculties: the eye sense faculty, the ear sense faculty, the nose sense faculty, the tongue sense faculty, and the body sense faculty. These are subtle physical forms that are part of the body, in dependence on which their respective sense consciousnesses are able to perceive visual objects, sounds, smells, and so on.

Therefore, an eye consciousness perceiving a tree, for instance, is generated as an experiencing and conscious entity in dependence on its immediately preceding condition. It is generated as an awareness that perceives a visual object (i.e. shape and color) in dependence on the eye sense faculty. It is generated as an awareness that perceives a particular visual object, in this case a tree, in dependence on its observed condition.



Unlike the five sense consciousnesses, the mental consciousness does not depend on a physical sense faculty but on a mental sense faculty. The mental sense faculty that serves as its uncommon dominant condition is the previous moment of the mental awareness.

As mentioned earlier, the presentation of the six causes and four conditions is unique to the Vaibashika school, for some of the characterizations of these causes are not accepted by the other tenet schools.

According to the followers of the Sautrantika, the Chittamatra, the Svatantrika Madhyamika, and the Prasangika Madhyamika school, only *potent active causes* are actual causes; *non-potent active causes* are not, because a permanent phenomenon (such as uncompounded space) cannot produce anything, and a phenomenon that merely allows a result to occur without producing it does not qualify as its cause.

The followers of the Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and the two Madhyamika schools also do not accept *concurrent causes* and *concomitant causes*, because a cause and its effect do not exist simultaneously. A cause always precedes its effect and by the time its effect has come into being, it has ceased to exist. Therefore, two phenomena cannot have a reciprocal causal relationship in which one is both the cause and the effect of the other.

Similarly, these tenet systems don't accept that all impermanent and permanent phenomena of the past, present, and future can serve as the *observed condition* of a mental consciousness. This is because permanent phenomena are not causes, and impermanent phenomena that exist at the same time as or after a mental consciousness cannot produce that consciousness, since a cause must precede its result.

However, despite the disagreement between the Vaibashika and the followers of the other schools regarding the categories and meanings of causes and conditions, they all agree that there are different types of causes and conditions.

Furthermore, the Vaibashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Svatantrika Madhyamika schools not only maintain that these causes exist inherently, but also that they are inherently different from their results, and that the results arise inherently from them. This brings us back to the main argument of these philosophers, presented in the second verse of the first chapter of the *Fundamental Wisdom*, namely, that the refutation of arising from something intrinsically different is not correct, because it is implied by the Buddha that the different causes such as the four conditions exist objectively and from their own side.

In response to the second verse, Nagarjuna says in the *Fundamental Wisdom*:

3.

The essence of entities

Does not exist in such things as the conditions.

If the entity that is self does not exist,

The entity that is other does not exist.

An alternative translation of this verse is:

3.

The nature of a thing

Does not exist in its conditions, etc.

If the thing itself does not exist,

Something different does not exist either.

This verse rebuts the buddhist assertion (indicated in verse two) that is contrary to the Prasangika Madhyamika tenet since it refutes the arising from something different. As noted before, the view of arising from something different implies the views (1) that a result inherently arises from its cause, and (2) that a result and its cause are inherently different.

Nagarjuna rejects these viewpoints by arguing that **the nature** or entity **of a thing** such as a sprout **does not exist in** or at the time of **its** causes and **conditions, etc.** **If the thing itself**, that is the sprout **does not exist** in or at the time of these causes, then inherently existent arising from **something** that is inherently **different** from the sprout **does not exist either**.

With these words Nagarjuna negates both (1) that a result inherently arises from its causes and (2) that a result and its cause are inherently different.

(1) The refutation of a result inherently arising from its cause

The preposition “in” that appears in the second line of the third verse (“**Does not exist in its conditions, etc.**”) indicates the seventh—the locative—case⁶.

Nagarjuna argues that a result such as a sprout does not inherently arise because the nature or essence of the sprout does not exist in its causes and condition, as if it were, for instance, a piece of fruit that is supported by the bowl in which it sits.

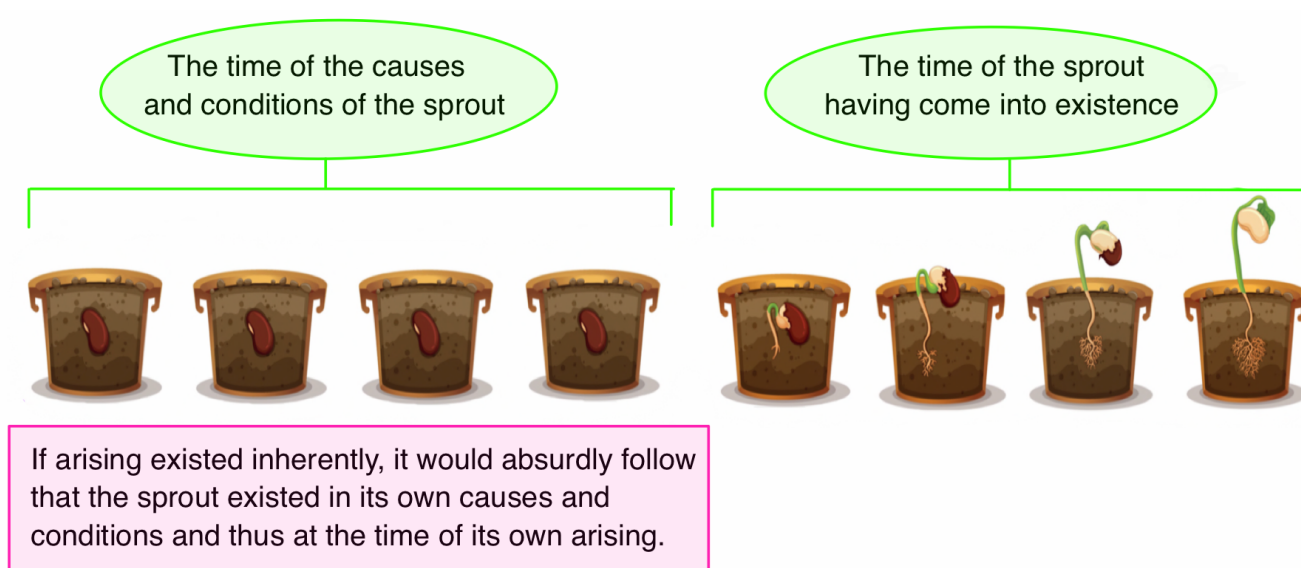
The sprout doesn't exist in its causes and conditions because it doesn't exist in them collectively, it doesn't exist in them individually, and it doesn't exist in any other cause (as indicated by the word “**etc.**” in the second line) that occurs at the same time as its causes and conditions.

This reasoning is based on the fact that if a result such as a sprout were to arise

⁶ As Tibetan grammar is based on Sanskrit grammar, both Sanskrit and Tibetan have eight cases. The eight cases are the: (1) nominative, (2) accusative, (3) instrumental, (4) dative, (5) ablative, (6) genitive, (7) locative, and (8) vocative. In both the Sanskrit and Tibetan version of the third verse of the *Fundamental Wisdom*, the locative is used to indicate the basis where something exists and the time when it exists.

objectively and from its own side, the sprout would exist in its own causes and conditions, because the sprout's causes and conditions are responsible for the arising of the sprout and it would not make sense if at the time of the inherent arising, that which arises (i.e. the sprout) didn't exist; the inherent action of arising of the sprout could not exist without the phenomenon on which it is based, namely the sprout.

Also, if the action of arising and the sprout existed objectively and from their own side, the arising of the sprout and the sprout would have to be one entity, because inherently existent phenomena would not depend on entities other than themselves. Therefore, the arising of the sprout and the sprout would exist simultaneously.

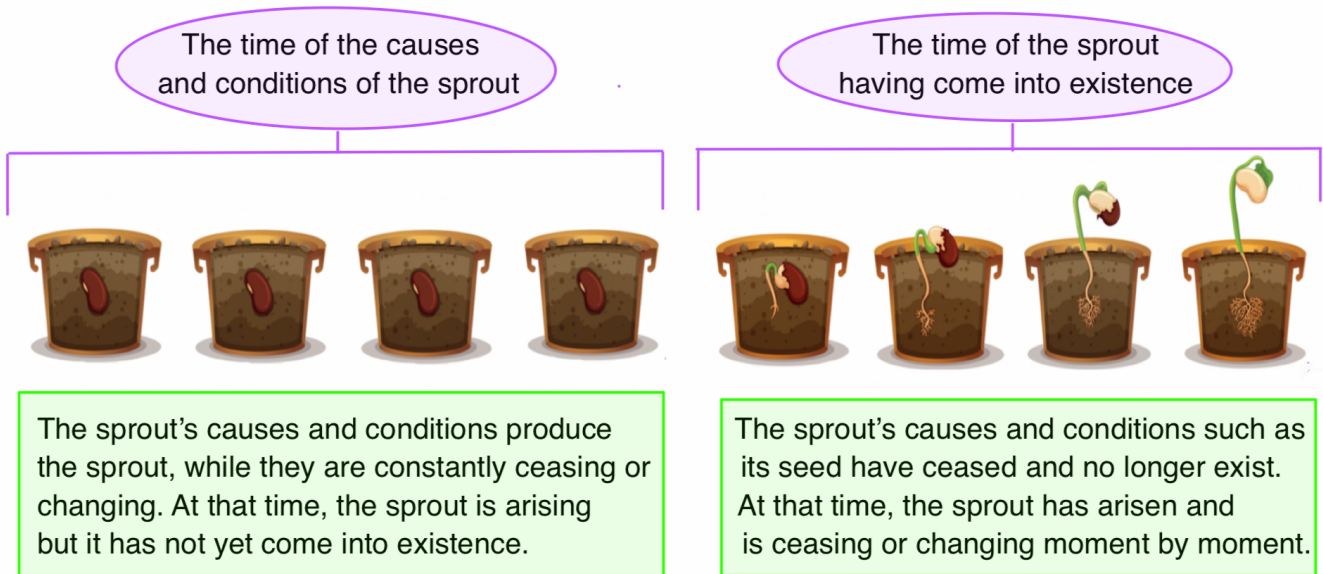


However, this is not tenable because a sprout doesn't exist prior to having arisen. As mentioned above, at the time of its causes and conditions, the sprout hasn't arisen because it has not yet come into existence. At that time, the sprout is arising since its causes and conditions are producing it.

This means that the time when the sprout has not yet arisen but is about to come into existence is the time of its arising. The time when it has come into existence is the time when it has arisen. Therefore, if the sprout were to exist at the same time as it arises, it would absurdly follow that it already existed when it is about to come into existence.

Furthermore, a result such as a sprout cannot exist simultaneously with its causes and conditions, because the following activities of a cause and its result occur at the

same time: a cause ceases⁷ at the same time as its result arises, and a cause having ceased and its result having arisen exist at the same time.



Another reason why a result such as the sprout cannot exist while it is arising is that if that were the case, we should be able to perceive that sprout. Also, it would be pointless for the sprout to be said to come into existence later, when its causes and conditions had ceased, because it already existed.

It is important to understand that the logical absurdities cited here would only ensue if arising were to exist inherently. They do not occur if phenomena lack inherent existence and are merely labeled. From the point of view of the Prasangika Madhyamika school, the 'arising of the sprout' exists conventionally; it is merely labeled in dependence on, for example, the different moments of the seed as they transform with the aid of conditions such as water, warmth, fertilizer, and so forth, and in the future become an entity referred to as "sprout". So although the arising of the sprout is dependent on the sprout, that doesn't mean the arising has to exist at

⁷ Please note that from a buddhist point of view, the term to cease (Tib. *jig pa*)—also translated as to disintegrate or to perish—is used for impermanent phenomena and is equivalent to the terms "to change" and "to be impermanent". These terms are equivalent because a phenomenon that ceases is necessarily impermanent or changes from moment to moment; and a phenomenon that is impermanent or changes from moment to moment necessarily ceases.

A seed, for example, changes every moment because it is made up of countless moments, each of which is different from a previous and a following moment.

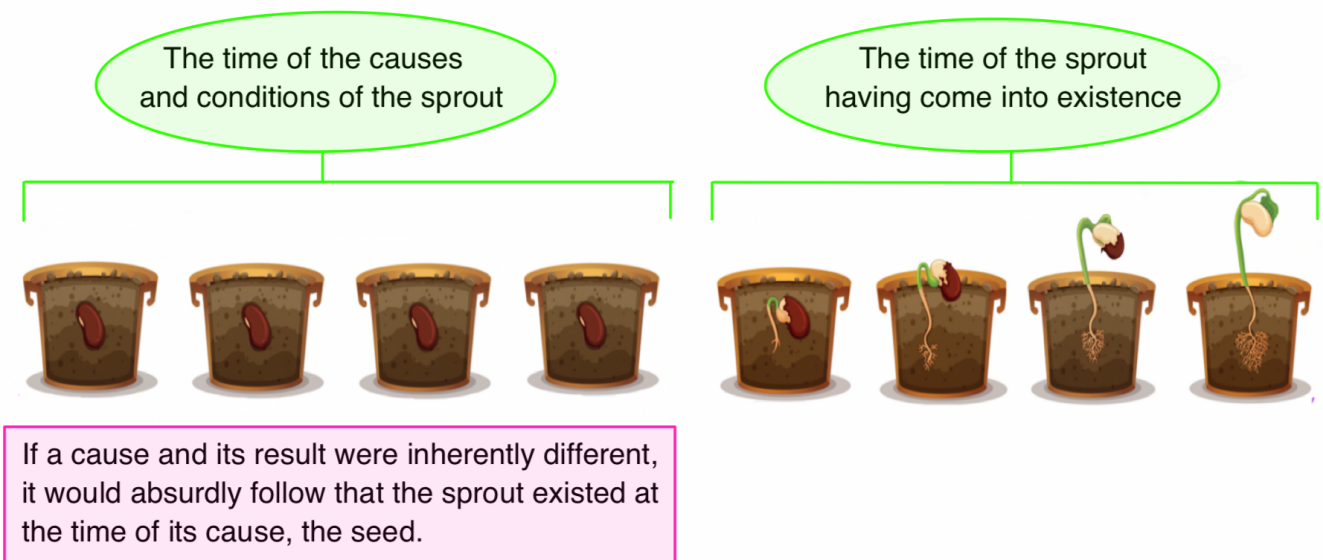
Likewise, a seed ceases moment to moment, because it is nearing the end of its existence, and for a later moment of a seed to arise, its earlier moment must have ceased. For example, the first moment of a seed ceases while it exists. Then, when it has given way to the second moment of the seed, the first moment has ceased (that is, it no longer exists). Hence, during the first moment of the seed, the first moment has arisen and is ceasing, while the second moment of the seed is arising. Then, during the second moment of the seed, the second moment has arisen, while the first moment of the seed has ceased, and so on.

the same time as the sprout since both the arising and the sprout are merely labeled.

(2) The refutation of a cause and its result being inherently different

In the context of the second refutation, the preposition “in” mentioned in the second line of the third verse indicates a temporal locative. Nagarjuna argues that if a cause and its result were inherently different, a result such as a sprout would exist at the time of its causes and conditions, because for a cause and its result to be inherently different they would have to exist simultaneously. Otherwise, there would be no time when they existed as different phenomena. At the time of the cause, its result has not yet arisen, and at the time of the result, its cause has ceased to exist.

Furthermore, there would be no point of reference, because when the cause exists, there is no result from which to differ, and when the result exists, there is no cause from which to be different. So a cause and its result being different would be like the existence of something ‘long’ without the existence of something ‘short’.



However, if a result were to exist at the time of its cause, the cause would have no influence on its result. So the result would be without a cause and therefore could not exist.

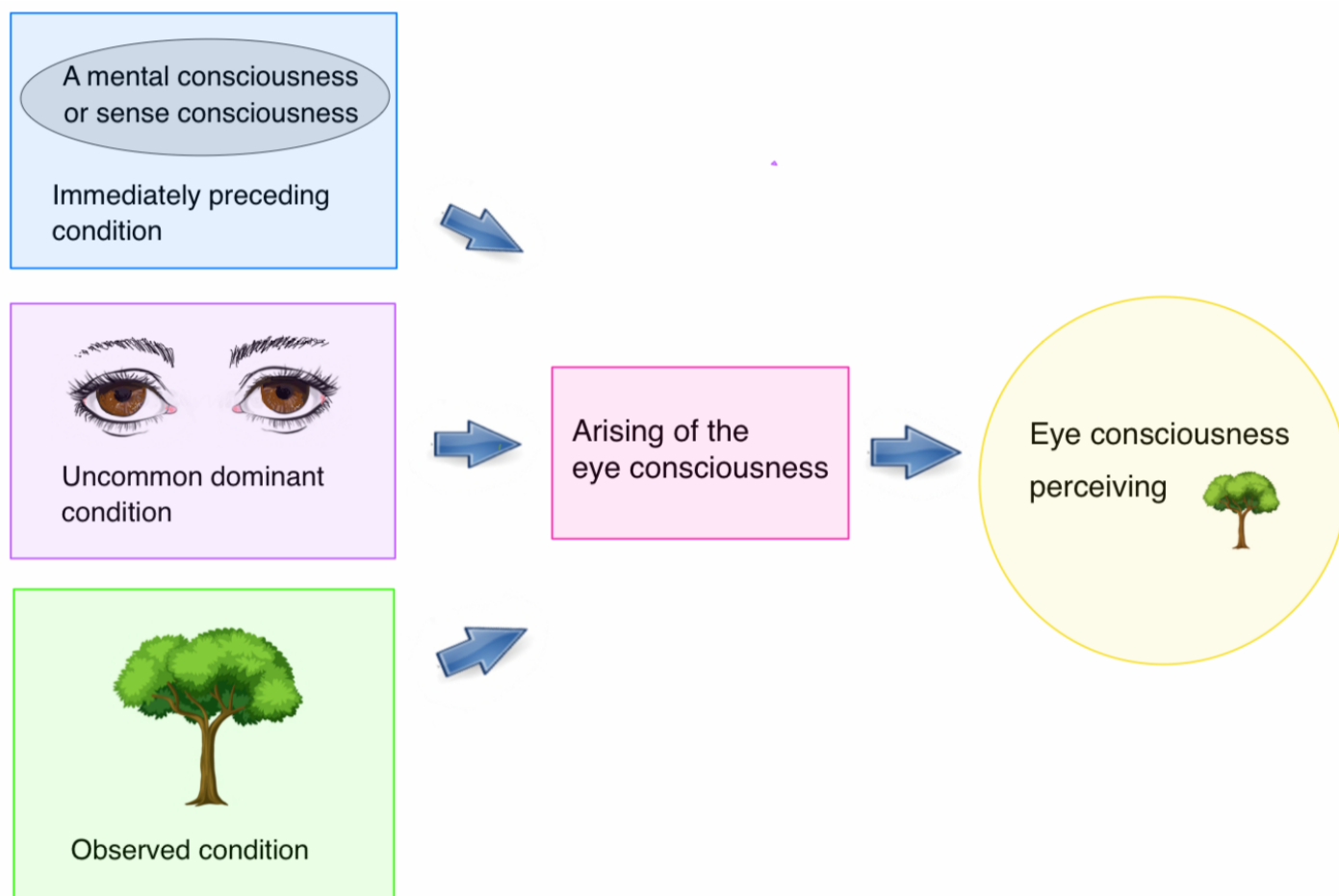
As before, it is important to note that these logical absurdities would only apply if a cause and its effect were inherently different. According to the Prasangika school, the difference between a cause and its result doesn't exist objectively and by way of its own character; it is merely labeled in dependence on, for instance, the fact that

they appear differently to a conceptual consciousness that thinks about them—even though they don't exist at the same time.

With these two refutations of the view of arising from something different Nagarjuna indicates that the quote from a sutra cited in verse two teaches that there are four *conventionally existent* conditions; it doesn't imply that these conditions exist inherently. Therefore, the sutras that teach that things arise from causes such as the four kinds of conditions do not present things as arising from something different.

Some philosophers misapprehend Nagarjuna's refutation of 'arising from something different' in verse three; they assert that Nagarjuna is not refuting inherent arising in general, but inherent arising of a result that arises directly from its conditions. According to these philosophers, there is no result that arises directly from its conditions, because results arise directly from actions. They hold that conditions produce an ontologically separate—and inherently existing—action of arising, and it is this activity that directly produces a result.

An eye consciousness perceiving a tree, for instance, does not arise directly from its immediately preceding condition (a previous moment of awareness), its uncommon dominant condition (the eye sense faculty) and its observed condition (the tree). Instead, they maintain, these three conditions generate the action of arising, which in turn gives rise to the eye consciousness perceiving the tree.



According to this view, causes and conditions such as the immediately preceding condition, the uncommon dominant condition, and the observed condition are called “conditions” because they engender the action of arising of a result, which then directly produces the result.

The analogy is cooking rice. Although a person, a container, water, and so on are needed to prepare a plate of rice, these are considered to be conditions that give rise to the action of boiling the rice, which in turn is what directly produces the cooked rice.

From a buddhist perspective, this tenet—whose proponents belong to the non-buddhist school of the Grammarians (Skt. *vaiyākaraṇa*, Tib. *brda sprod pa*)—is not tenable, because it doesn’t make sense that there should be a time when the three conditions such as the immediately preceding condition exist, but consciousness doesn’t arise from them directly, or a time when the arising of consciousness takes place, but the three conditions have ceased. This reasoning is based on the fact that if causes such as the three conditions were to generate an arising of consciousness, the three conditions would necessarily be the causes of that arising and thus could not exist simultaneously with it (so that at the time of the three conditions, there would be no arising of consciousness and at the time of arising of consciousness, the three conditions would no longer be present).

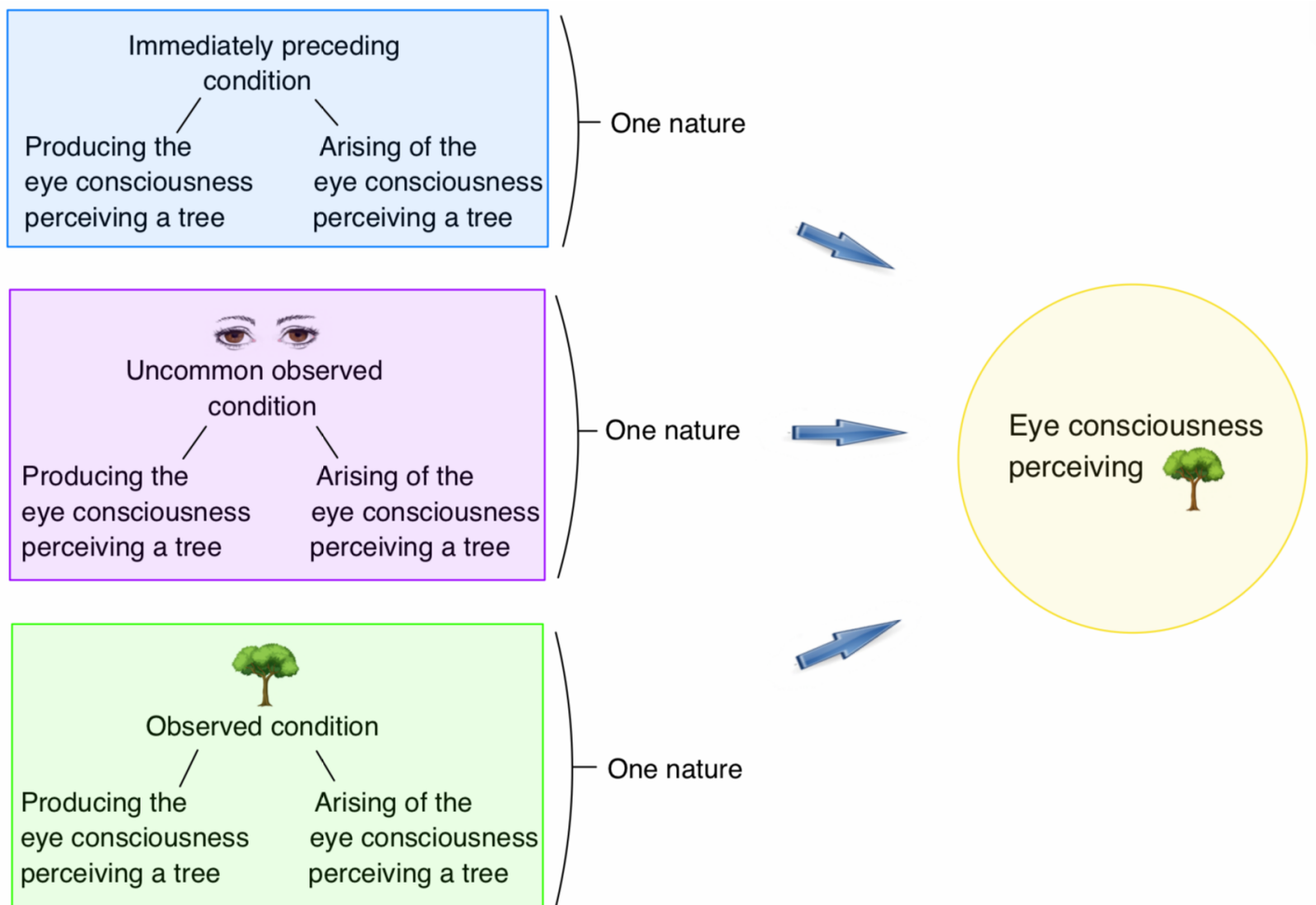
Therefore, although the arising of consciousness depends on the three conditions, arising is not produced by the three. It is not the case that the coming into existence of consciousness is preceded by the three conditions. Thus, there is no arising of consciousness that exists between the time of the existence of the three conditions and the existence of consciousness. Instead, the three conditions and the arising of consciousness exist simultaneously and directly give rise to consciousness.

It is important to understand that each of the three conditions of an eye consciousness perceiving a tree, for instance, performs the function of producing that eye consciousness. The immediately preceding condition, the eye sense faculty, and (the observed condition) the tree each give rise to the eye consciousness perceiving the tree. Since each of the three conditions produce the eye consciousness, each one also facilitates the arising or coming into existence of the eye consciousness.

In fact, the three conditions, their individual function of producing the eye consciousness and the action of arising of the eye consciousness, which is brought about by the three conditions, exist simultaneously.

Furthermore, (1) the action of arising of a result, (2) the causes and conditions of the result, and (3) the function of the causes and conditions to produce the result are all of one

nature. In the case of the eye consciousness perceiving a tree this means that the arising of the eye consciousness, its three conditions, and the three conditions producing the eye consciousness are of one nature.



Please note that arising is an action that has an agent (a phenomenon that performs the action), in this case the eye consciousness. While the three conditions produce the eye consciousness, that which is produced, the eye consciousness performs the action of arising; the eye consciousness is that which arises in dependence on the three conditions. Therefore, the eye consciousness and its arising depend on each other as action and agent, even though they do not exist at the same time.

Returning to the view of the Grammarians, not only do these non-buddhist philosophers maintain that impermanent phenomena are the direct results of the action of arising and not of their causes and conditions, they also hold that arising exists objectively and from its own side. Regarding this assertion, the same reasoning that was presented in verse three to refute inherent arising can be applied here.

Additionally, Nagarjuna presents the following reasoning:

The *Fundamental Wisdom* reads:

4.

Action does not have conditions.

There is no action without conditions.

There are no conditions without action.

Nor do any have action.

An alternative translation is:

4.

An action has no conditions.

There is no action that is without conditions.

That which lacks action is no condition.

Nor do conditions have action.

Here, for an action to “have conditions” or be “with conditions” means that the action of arising is dependent on conditions which are responsible for its existence. An example is the arising of an eye consciousness that is dependent on the three conditions of the eye consciousness.

For conditions to “have action” means that conditions such as the three conditions of the eye consciousness are responsible for the action of arising, failing which they wouldn’t be conditions.

Regarding the meaning of the verse: Since, according to the philosophical view of the Grammarians and many buddhist schools, the inherent action of arising produces results such as an eye consciousness, one might ask: Does such an action have conditions, that is, does it depend on conditions such as the three conditions?

Nagarjuna replies that **an** inherent **action has no** such **conditions**, because it doesn’t depend on them. This is because an inherent action such as arising doesn’t exist, for if it existed, we would be able to find it in relation to that which arises, its agent (an eye consciousness).

Taking the example of an inherent action of arising that generates an eye consciousness: The action of arising generates either (1) an eye consciousness that has arisen or (2) an eye consciousness that has not arisen. There is no third possibility, because whatever

exists either has arisen or not arisen⁸, and since an eye consciousness exists, it is necessarily one of the two.

Regarding the first possibility, it would be pointless for arising to produce (1) an eye consciousness that has arisen, because what has already arisen has already been produced and does not need to be produced again.

Nor does it make sense to say that arising produces (2) an eye consciousness that has not arisen, because such a consciousness doesn't exist. There is no consciousness that has not arisen. Consciousness is impermanent, it has therefore necessarily arisen in dependence on its causes and conditions. If inherent arising could produce an eye consciousness that had not arisen, it could also produce other non-existences, such as the horns of a rabbit or the hair of a tortoise.

Finally, since everything that exists has either arisen or not arisen, there is nothing that is “currently arising” that is not one of the two. Thus, inherent arising cannot be found in relation to what has arisen, what has not arisen, or what is in the process of arising, and since it cannot be found to give rise to anything in the three times, we can conclude that it doesn't exist, and therefore does not depend on conditions.

But if one thinks that an action such as arising has no conditions, Nagarjuna explains that **there is no action without conditions**, because there is no (conventionally existing) arising of a result that is not dependent on the conditions that produce the result. So if the three conditions that facilitate arising of an eye consciousness did not exist, there would be no arising of the eye consciousness, that is, the eye consciousness would not arise or come into existence.

If there were arising of the eye consciousness without such causes and conditions, it would follow that the eye consciousness and all other impermanent phenomena could arise without causes and conditions. This would mean that anything could arise from anything, and all efforts to bring about a particular result would be in vain.

⁸ Everything that exists is necessarily one of the two: either it has arisen or it has not arisen. An impermanent phenomenon such as consciousness has arisen, because it has been produced by its own causes and conditions. A permanent phenomenon such as emptiness has not arisen, because, although it exists, it doesn't have causes and conditions.

Please note that in the context of cause and effect, the term “arise” (Tib. *skye ba*) is used only for impermanent phenomena and means to come into existence in dependence on causes and conditions. In the context of dependent arising, however, the term “arise” (Tib. *byung ba*) applies to all phenomena and simply means to come into existence.

Tibetan employs different terms for these two contexts (“*skye ba*” and “*byung ba*”). However, since both Tibetan terms denote intransitive active verbs many English translations—for want of another suitable word—use the same term in both situations.

On the other hand, one might think that since the arising of a result doesn't exist, there is only the action of producing the result which is performed by the conditions. In other words, one might assume that there are only conditions that produce a result such as an eye consciousness, but that there is no arising of the eye consciousness since arising has previously been negated.

In response to this, Nagarjuna explains: **That which lacks action is not a condition.** This means that if the action of arising doesn't exist, that which is responsible for that nonexistent action doesn't exist either and thus is not a condition. The words "**lacks action**" do not refer here to conventionally existing actions, but to intrinsically existing actions. Nagarjuna argues that since there is no inherently existing action of arising, there can be no conditions on which such an action depends. For if something doesn't exist, how can there be conditions that are responsible for its existence? And if conditions such as the immediately preceding condition etc. didn't facilitate the arising of their result such as an eye consciousness, how could they be conditions? If they were conditions without being responsible for the arising of their result, it would follow that anything could be a condition of anything.

Therefore, a condition is only a condition if it doesn't "lack the action of arising", i.e. if it is responsible for the (conventionally existing) action of arising of its result.

Suppose one thought that only conditions that "have arising", i.e. that are responsible for the arising of their result, produce or give rise to that result. However, Nagarjuna explains that **conditions have no action**, because conditions have no inherently existing action, that is, they are not responsible for the inherently existent action of arising.

In short, the first two lines of verse four indicate that the action of arising of a result neither "has conditions" nor is "without them", while the last two lines indicate that conditions neither "lack the action of arising" nor "have the action of arising".

In other words, the first two lines indicate that the arising of a result such as an eye consciousness neither depends nor does not depend on conditions such as the immediately preceding condition etc., while the last two lines indicate that conditions such as the immediately preceding condition etc. are neither not responsible nor responsible for the arising of the eye consciousness.